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# Reframing Television Performance

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PHILIP DRAKE

A DECADE AGO, I WROTE AN ARTICLE TITLED “Reconceptualizing Screen Performance” for a 2006 special edition of this journal. A number of writers have gratifyingly engaged with a range of the points I made there; however, it seems to me that the arguments I presented neither changed *doxa* nor have had an adequate refutation in the rethinking of screen performance. My central argument was that performance is fundamentally different from representation and that all media texts are essentially performative, constructing particular relationships between performer and audience. Further, I suggested that an emphasis on discerning intentionality “in” performance (and by an actor) is, for me, a less productive approach than analyzing how performances deploy a particular repertoire of techniques and skills to structure meaning and inference, regardless of whether the actor may intend this or not. In my earlier article, I also noted that there had been a relative lack of attention given to critical analysis of screen performance relative to the plethora of acting manuals and studies of individual stars and the considerable focus on acting in journalistic interviews (the latter usually conducted in press junkets, carefully stage-managed by

the actor’s publicist). A decade later, although there has been more sustained exploration of film performance, there is—and this was missing in my own article—an even greater lack of analysis of television performance. This absence is especially odd considering the significant attention given to what has become termed “quality TV” in the past decade or so, applied to TV shows in which, ironically, television performances are quite clearly central to the shows’ achievements and audience engagement.<sup>1</sup> The distinctiveness of such quality television as *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad*, and *House of Cards*, it seems to me, is at least in part due to their screen performances.

My starting point in thinking about performance in my earlier article was to place emphasis on framing, arguing that “conceptualizing performance involves not just reading actors’ performances, important though this is, but also a wider consideration of the ontology of film, and the epistemological frames through which screen performance makes sense” (Drake, “Reconceptualizing” 84). Only by opening up questions of ontology and epistemology, I suggested, can we understand the particularity of screen performance, how it is different from everyday performance, and how it is meaningful. In making this point, I was drawing on a range of work from symbolic interactionism, phenomenological sociology, ordinary language philosophy, and media and performance studies, rather than the limited theoretical work on performance in film and television studies. Part of my article was focused on star performers who bring extratextual celebrity signification to their roles, offering

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audiences a multiply coded performance, where the actor is recognized both as a star performing himself or herself and as a character within a narrative. However, I was also interested in the performance of the nonrecognizable supporting actors and the work they perform, anchoring those stars to dramatic realism and verisimilitude through performances using indirect address. This services narrative and works with rather than against *mise-en-scène*, reinforcing fourth-wall staging, and uses effaced camera, synchronous sound, and other conventions of realist drama. My analysis of Marlon Brando's screen performance in the opening scene of *The Godfather* (1972), for instance, considered the performance of the star, Brando, playing Don Corleone against the anchoring function offered by the Italian actor playing Bonasera, Salvatore Corsitto (Drake, "Reconceptualizing" 90–92). Brando, I suggested, is positioned in order to be presented as an ostended sign, mediated through his star image. Brando's performance draws upon the other actor in the scene, who performs according to a different, realist economy of acting. Corsitto—an actor who made very few film appearances—secures realism through his representational performance, anchoring the narrative.

I now wish to turn to television. In his reexamination of television's "personality system," updating the term used by John Langer in 1981 to outline how television fame differed from cinematic stardom, James Bennett suggests a distinction between "televisually skilled" and "vocationally skilled" performers. He argues, "Televisually skilled performers are defined by the performers' *lack* of any skill, other than that of television presenting, that *informs* their performance—the content of the show is irrelevant to their 'real' life or any 'skills' they may hold therein" (Bennett 36; author's italics). Discerning skill is, however, a matter of inference, so such distinctions can be made by considering the framing of performance: the television presenter is placed within a performance frame that gives her or his performance its particular authority and meaning. Bennett argues for the distinction to be retained between stars and television personalities, but

by insisting that personalities are not elided with actors/stars. Making a distinction between the television actor or star and the television personality, he argues that "performers who play themselves, mak[e] little distinction between onscreen and private personas" (Bennett 35). Freed from dominant conventions of realism, such as indirect address and fourth-wall camera placement, television performance is routinely more varied: a news presenter, for instance, can perform live and direct to camera; a quiz show can acknowledge the camera; a comedy can disrupt conventions of realism without breaking frame. Television performance includes not only dramatic acting but also direct-address performance of news presenting, hosting of quiz shows, performing with non-actors in lifestyle and makeover shows, performing "self" in reality television formats, and more (Lury). The exploration of a range of performances in Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood's work on reality television audiences and the varied essays in Christine Cornea's collection on genre and film and television performance all demonstrate the wide range of performers and modes of performance at play across television.

The familiar relationship one has with television performances has also changed with shifts in television technology (Newman and Levine). The rise of high-definition television sets (1080p and, more recently, 4K resolution "Ultra HD" sets), as well as an overall rise in average television screen sizes and multiple-screen households, means that television performance can be scrutinized more closely and in more detail by audiences. The availability of video and then DVD box sets and, more recently, video-on-demand (VOD) services has meant that audiences can also experience television performances in new ways: "binge-watching" an entire season, for instance, or watching episodes across multiple devices in self-scheduled viewing slots. As is the case for many people, my own viewing practices have altered, and my viewing is regularly done via "catch-up" and nonlinear television services available through the Internet rather than via traditional linear broadcast television. The example I discuss later in this article,

FX's *The Americans*, I watched entirely online via Internet services (in this case Amazon Prime Video) rather than as a scheduled broadcast.

## Television Performance: Accumulation, Repetition, Pleasure

To address television performance in detail, I wish to set aside debates over television stardom or personality systems: issues I have considered elsewhere in analyzing television entertainers and reality television celebrities (Drake, "Celebrity"; Drake and Haynes). Through the rest of this article, I wish to examine performance in television drama. In Bennett's terms, I am focusing on the television actor, who performs a role rather than personifies it, rather than on the television personality. This is in contrast to most work on television performers, which focuses on television's celebrity system. Here I am less interested in the celebrity performer than on the actor who stars in a drama but is not widely known publicly as a television personality. Specifically, I want to explore the *accumulation* of an actor's performance *across* a television series, or several series, and the familiarity one builds in the repeated viewing of that performer over a significant duration. An example of this might be the accumulated performance of James Gandolfini in *The Sopranos*. Although he was ultimately a star—and had a career that spanned television and film—Gandolfini's performances across work of several years' duration as Tony Soprano defined his star image, rather than vice versa.

Accumulated performances—through so-called box-set viewing—present analysis with some difficulties: Which part to analyze? How was it experienced? In addition, a number of writers—most notably, John Caughie—have felt and expressed their sense of the lost potential in television to provoke ideas and offer political engagement, lost in a seemingly endless supply of global television content. The plenitude of television and the accumulation of programming, decoupled from a strong public service ethos and committed political engagement, has—for these writers—led to a loss of purpose, to television

no longer mattering in the ways that it did previously (Caughie, "Playing"; Caughie, "Telephilia"; Caughie, "Mourning"). The "must-see" single play of British television in the 1970s has, in the United Kingdom, been partially replaced by the "must-see TV" imported from US cable networks, available to watch online. Accumulation and plenitude can be a double-edged sword. For Caughie, this "monstrous accumulation of television" ("Mourning" 418) has led to

the loss of a "seriousness" in which television actually matters; of a "popularity" which is not simply obedient to the market; the fading of the possibilities of a different television which seemed to open in the UK with Channel 4; or the waning of an object of study which has simply been overwhelmed by too many texts—too many texts for the discipline of television studies to discipline; too many texts and too many carriers of texts. ("Mourning" 411)

The discussion of "seriousness" and the loss of "mattering" might be related to debates around what has become termed "quality TV." McCabe and Akass and also Newman and Levine position "quality TV" as a discursive construct, quoting HBO's famous slogan "It's not TV. It's HBO." Through a range of writings (especially that published by the journal *Critical Studies in Television*), analysis of quality TV has reignited debates about "serious" television and the breaking of television conventions in terms of content (sex, profanity) and aesthetics ("shaky" mobile camerawork, heightened realism, naturalistic modes of performance, and lack of cause-and-effect relations). Similarly, Robin Nelson's analysis of "high-end" TV drama places emphasis on both the aesthetics and the thought-provoking cultural politics of these television series. Such writing positions performance, though often indirectly and without great elaboration, as key to such television drama. Karen Lury points out the unruly nature of television performance across different genres, and Christine Cornea suggests that

the arrival of what is commonly called "Quality" television has also increased the

relevance of performance as central to the meaning and success of a genre series: if film genres were often criticised for their one-dimensional characters, then recent television drama series seem to have taken those characters and added a depth, complexity and degree of reflexivity that foregrounds the work of the performer. Witness the bravura performance of eccentric and dysfunctional detectives and doctors (e.g. *Monk*, *Silent Witness*, *House*), the complex ensemble performances in series/serial from *The Sopranos* to *The West Wing* to *Sex and the City*, and the compellingly elusive performances in series/serial like *Twin Peaks*, *The X-Files* and *Lost*. (10–11)

Depth, complexity, and reflexivity are, of course, partly subjective. In my earlier article, drawing on James Naremore's analysis of film acting, I discussed the way that individual performers become associated with a repertoire of performance signs: their "idiolect," the performance signs strongly associated with a particular actor. However, my analysis lacked adequate elaboration of how idiolect functions accumulatively for all performers, not just stars (although the latter bring greater extratextual signification into play). Naremore also argues that performance can be considered with regard to two key sets of rhetorical conventions: the "mode of address" and the "degree of ostensiveness" (34). The mode of address, he argues, can be read as operating along a scale ranging from indirect to direct address, which is loosely mapped to the continuum from representational to presentational performance. Representational performance, he suggests, tends to efface the production of the performance in order to be read as "behaving," whereas presentational performance tends to foreground the performer as performer rather than character. Naremore uses the term "ostensiveness" to refer to the scale of the gestures of the performance—the showing of the performance. Accumulated performances—the building up of detail and the use of familiar facial expressions, gestures, movements, and vocal signs—are just as important to an understand-

ing of character development for non-star and supporting actors. Across a thirteen-episode US television series, for example, a viewer will spend approximately ten hours accumulating knowledge of a character through the details of performance, the repeated gestures, glances, eye movements, expressive use of body and face, inflection of voice, and so on. As I described in my earlier article, the face, eyes, and voice of the performer are potent signs in the performance idiolect in that they are often read as the site of presence, anchored through the body. The 2016 relaunch of *The X-Files*, for example, draws on the idiolect of detectives Mulder (David Duchovny) and Scully (Gillian Anderson)—and the familiarity that the majority of the audience has with the characters they perform—as shorthand for understanding the new episodes, some fourteen years after the original show ended.

Scrutinizing such details is important, and our analysis of screen performance in US television drama can draw on the approaches elaborated by Constantin Stanislavski and developed by Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler, and others (Blum) that have influenced actor training in the United States. However, as I argued in my earlier article, these models make assumptions of presence and intention that tend to efface the inferential work of the audience and the schema through which such performances are decoded. Often such schema draw on culturally situated knowledge, framing performance as meaningful in a particular way. For instance, most US viewers would probably recognize *House* (Fox, 2004–12) star Hugh Laurie through his performances as a taciturn, obstinate American hospital doctor. Many UK viewers would note the shift in register in this show from Laurie's earlier performances—well known in the United Kingdom—as half of a double act (and a quintessential upper-class Englishman) in the UK comedies *A Bit of Fry and Laurie* (BBC, 1989–95), *Blackadder* (BBC, 1986–89), and *Jeeves and Wooster* (BBC, 1990–93). I now wish to offer a more sustained consideration of television performance through detailed analysis of *The Americans* (FX, 2013–).

## Playing at Being American, Revisited: *The Americans* and Television Performance

In his 1990 article “Playing at Being American,” John Caughie discusses the reception of US television from the perspective of one at the margins of American culture. He recounts engaging in a play of irony and knowingness, watching as a detached spectator rather than caught through cultural imperialism, engaged yet also distanced. Recalling Raymond Williams’s famous description of watching US television and his discussion of “flow,” Caughie presents his viewing as a game of dissociation and engagement, as ironic playing with the cultural codes of “American-ness” that enable local understandings and sometimes resistant readings to be made (“Playing” 57). The globalization of television over the past twenty-five years since Caughie’s account was written and the rise of formats and global television celebrity have all weakened the possibilities of such distanced viewing. Adopting a similarly self-reflexive tone, I want to present an analysis of a US television series, *The Americans*, brought to the screen by a major US network (FX, owned by Fox) yet experienced by me in similarly distanced ways as Caughie’s account.

*The Americans* (2013–) is a Cold War spy thriller serial drama, commissioned and broadcast by the US cable network FX, a subsidiary of Twenty-First Century Fox, and coproduced by FX Productions and Fox Television Studios. Beyond the United States, *The Americans* has aired in numerous countries worldwide, including on ITV2 in the United Kingdom. Set in 1980s Washington, DC, it follows two “deep cover” KGB agents living as a suburban American married couple under the pseudonyms Philip and Elizabeth Jennings, raising two unsuspecting children. After widespread critical acclaim, FX recently announced that it has commissioned a fourth season of *The Americans*. The show attracts a modest one million viewers per episode, a number that FX claims accounts for only a quarter of the show’s weekly audience when time-shifted viewing is included (Hibberd). Indeed, in a coup for Amazon (as a direct competi-

tor to subscription VOD market leader Netflix), its Amazon Prime VOD service secured exclusive US VOD rights to *The Americans* in January 2014 (Spangler), leveraging interest in “catch-up” viewing of the series to recruit subscribers.

*The Americans* is an interesting example to consider in analyzing television performance for a number of reasons. First, it presents a “quality TV” show that is reflexive about nation, cultural context, and performance. Second, it offers a layering of television performance that rewards closer scrutiny—the very premise is based on performing a deception, requiring the actors to “play American” and sometimes be “Russian,” yet within a 1980s US setting. As a viewer I have a privileged insight into the characters’ secret and thus can recognize both “them” and “not them” in their acting. Third—and referring to this section’s heading and Caughie’s article—not only are they playing at being American, but so am I, a British viewer watching the show in Scotland, England, and North Africa, streaming it on tablets and smart TV apps and consuming one or two episodes per evening, with gaps. I viewed the show via Amazon Prime Video on a variety of different screens (tablet, laptop, and streaming television app) and at different locations, which as a viewer experience is removed from the traditional weekly linear broadcast mode yet is an increasingly common way of watching.

An interesting aspect of much “quality TV” is the casting of performers who are relatively unknown, or at least non-stars, yet highly trained and accomplished actors, in major US television roles. The accumulation of signification associated with major stars has the potential to work against the emphasis in television drama on character and performance over star as spectacle. The casting of Welsh actor Matthew Rhys as Philip Jennings follows a recent and noted trend in which US quality dramas have cast British actors in major roles, notable examples of which include Dominic West and Idris Elba in *The Wire*, Andrew Lincoln in *The Walking Dead*, and Ashley Jensen in *Ugly Betty*. According to Christopher Holliday, British actors are recognized as “an economically viable alterna-

tive to American performers” with a “productive anonymity” that “preserv[es] an authenticity for viewers who do not identify them through the prism of previous characters.” Furthermore, “[t]he ‘Quality’ of ‘Quality television’ in the US . . . becomes ascribed to the acting abilities of the UK actor” (Holliday 66). Just like the “spies next door” in *The Americans*, “a growing wealth of British-born actors in contemporary US television drama have managed to integrate seamlessly and convincingly into their adopted homeland” (Holliday 79).

The intertextuality of performance I noted in my earlier article relating to previous roles (“Reconceptualizing” 88–89) also occurs within television performance, in which an actor can become known for one long-lived role but in a distinctly different way—hence, Keri Russell’s performance in *The Americans* pilot was regularly assessed by US critics in relation to her previous starring role as the eponymous character in *Felicity* (1998–2002). Given the decade-long gap between *Felicity* and her appearance in *The Americans*, some critics in particular made reference to her age (“A finely matured Keri Russell,” wrote Stuever) and the contrast in the new role in comparison with the earlier one. For the majority of UK viewers, with different cultural capital, Russell was unknown, and therefore her performance came unencumbered with such history. Yet the premise of the show means that performances are layered—or in Goffman’s terms, laminated—containing sections where the principal actors need to go undercover, keyed through their ostensive use of wigs and glasses alongside quickly changed clothes and makeup; this layering is described by Matthew Rhys, who plays Philip Jennings, as “an actor’s dream, because you’re playing parts within parts” (Geller). The double-ness of performance here is notable in allowing a commentary on the performance within the primary frame. Rhys and Russell are playing Philip and Elizabeth, but also a range of other characters in disguise, and their performances need to cue the relevant frame for us to determine which character they are performing.

The ostensibly disguised “Clark,” another one of Matthew Rhys’s American alter egos, is

distinguished from Philip by way of a floppy-fringed gray wig and big fake glasses, along with a greater propensity to grin broadly, emphasizing his upper row of teeth. The pilot episode of *The Americans*, which first aired on FX in January 2013, introduced us not only to Philip and Elizabeth but also to some of their bewigged alter egos; additionally, via flashback, we see their younger selves in training in Russia twenty years earlier and then see them arriving in the United States and adjusting to their arranged marriage. Interestingly, though many critics were broadly positive about the pilot episode, many criticized the use of costume changes and the flashback scenes, which were seen as lacking believability in that neither actor looked convincingly younger. Critics singled out the wigs in particular, describing them variously as “comedy wigs” (Hogan), “goofy wigs” (Stuever), “iffy wigs” (Higgins), “a harrowing procession of wigs” (Donaghy), and “an increasingly preposterous rotation of wigs” (Nicholson). This suggests a critical wariness of the use of props to rekey and accentuate or draw particular attention to performance. However, Naremore notes how objects and props can be used expressively in acting (83–96). *The Americans* uses wigs and other devices as ostensive tools to rekey the actors’ performances, indicating to the viewer that the character onscreen is a performance of a performance.

The opening ten minutes of the pilot introduce us to the leads alongside other minor characters, without initially explicitly drawing attention to who is who; instead, the emphasis is on following several lines of action that converge upon the abduction of a man later revealed to be a Russian defector. As the episode commences with a title card stating “Washington DC, 1981” and the saxophone solo from Quarterflash’s “Hand on My Heart,” we glimpse a man and a woman sitting at a dimly lit cocktail bar through a hazy scene of smoke, martini glasses, and shadowy faceless men in suits. We will later come to realize that the woman is Elizabeth disguised with a peroxide-blond wig, smilingly flirting with a Department of Justice official. At this point, in





Figure 1: Elizabeth's (Keri Russell) introduction to the audience in disguise.

this opening scene, we are not aware of her significance or of her disguise. Here Keri Russell uses a specific technique that recurs in several scenes in the episode—that of a serious preoccupied glance away to the side, which in this brief scene interrupts her smile. The glance at this point is subtle and hidden by distracted handling and drinking from her wine glass—a combination of what I termed in my earlier article “diversionary business” and “disclosive compensation”—and her performance idiolect signposts her character’s hidden agenda.

After a brief sex scene we follow Russell’s character as she returns to her car. Sitting in the driver’s seat, she seems to briefly lose composure, sighing exasperatedly, wiping her mouth in disgust, and pulling off her wig, revealing her “true” appearance and feelings to the viewer. Thus, the opening scene of *The Americans* sets up multiple performance frames, and the viewer has privileged narrative information in order to

judge who is the “authentic” character (Elizabeth) through Russell’s performance, as distinct from her character performing in disguise.

Similarly, in the next scene Philip is first shown alongside another minor character, without any initially clear indications of his significance or of the two characters’ relative importance. But unlike our first introduction to Elizabeth, he is not using an ostensive disguise at this point, which we realize only retrospectively. Instead, his superficial chat with the other character (a recruit) about sports is a performance of normality, charm, and seeming “Americanness.” As their object of surveillance, a Russian defector, gets closer, we first see an indication of what becomes and is retrospectively understood, through repeated use, as a gesture of “Russian-ness,” in which Philip stares with an intensely stern facial expression, emphasized by a close-up and lighting on his eyes alongside the low-key lighting of this nighttime scene.



Figure 2: Philip (Matthew Rhys) in close-up, using facial expression and eyes.





Figure 3: Philip's (Matthew Rhys) sideways stare.

Philip's stern-faced stare makes another appearance within the first twenty minutes of the pilot, after he has threatened the Russian defector now trapped in the boot of his and Elizabeth's car and sent the kids off to school, in a scene that involves dialogue only from background police but shows him seated on a park bench. In addition to Philip's silence and the use of close-ups emphasizing his stares, the use of cross-cutting to point-of-view shots incorporating crash zooms (as though Philip has zoom lenses for eyes) further structures his stare for the viewer, aligning our view with his look via point-of-view shots.

Not long later, a scene in which the Jennings family gets ice cream together shows a recurrence of Elizabeth's signifying glance. In contrast, Philip's charming, jocular mode is in full flight with no sign of his earlier stare. Here we see Philip playing "ice cream Olympics" with his children, while Elizabeth seems less

enthusiastic. This is not the first scene in which we meet the children of the Jennings', Paige and Henry, but this scene uses their performances, alongside diversionary business with ice cream, to foreground particular characteristics of their performance of themselves. The trope of the family-who-are-not-what-they-seem has recurred in American high-concept quality TV, with *Breaking Bad* and *The Sopranos* being key examples, and this scene particularly emphasizes how we (the audience) have more narrative privilege than the children. Here audience knowledge functions to inform an understanding of both narrative and performance. As such, the relationships between performances are more sophisticated than usually ascribed to television acting, and arguably, this privileges the long-form medium's ability to illuminate the accumulation of character knowledge through performance.

We might productively recall Roland Barthes's deconstruction of "italianicity" (in



Figure 4: The Jennings family playing at being American in *The Americans*.

his well-known essay “Rhetoric of the Image”) in considering Philip and Elizabeth’s performance of “Russian-ness.” This is coded by their performances, drawing on cultural stereotypes of the “unsmiling Russian” prevalent in American culture and most famously voiced in an outburst by Russian émigré and right-wing author Ayn Rand in her testimony in 1947 to the House Un-American Activities Committee. This case concerned the Hollywood film *Song of Russia* (1944), with Rand lambasting what she regarded as the film’s suspiciously pro-Communist and “unrealistic” portrayal of smiling Russians. A number of television critics noted the coding of “Soviet-ness” or “Russian-ness” and “American-ness” in the various performances in *The Americans*, not least in Rhys’s skin and black eyebrows: “Rhys’s face dominates: the contrast turned up to 11 on his pale skin and black brows with cheekbones that could slice kielbasa” (Raeside). In some flashback scenes in season 1, we hear the two leading actors speak Russian, but we never hear them speak English with Russian accents. There is the anchoring—a term used by Barthes—of the two leading actors, neither of whom are Russian, with supporting actors who are some way connected with Eastern Europe, Russia, and the former USSR (Arkady Zotov [Russian actor Lev Gorn], General Zhukov [Polish actor Olek Krupa], and Nina [Annet Mahendru, whose mother is Russian and who speaks Russian]). An interesting exception is the American actor Margo Martindale, who plays the “motherly and deadly KGB handler” (O’Neill), although she too is clearly coded as “Russian” and “playing American” through her performances: the former as severe and unsmiling, the latter as jocular and friendly. As in my earlier examination of supporting actors in *The Godfather*, the anchoring of the leading actors and their perceived authenticity is, here, in part achieved through the coded ethnicity of the supporting cast. Their “Russian-ness” is anchored by Arkady, Nina, and others, who provide the background performances necessary for narrative realism.

The adversary of the Jennings family is Stan Beeman, played by prominent character actor

Noah Emmerich, an FBI agent who moves in next door. The pilot introduces Beeman as having just started working in counterintelligence after three years spent undercover among white supremacists. Emmerich is a veteran character actor, familiar from a range of film and television roles, with an understated presence, characterized in particular by a deep voice and an “actorly” diction that is camouflaged with a casual drawl. Both the low pitch and the drawl imbue his voice with warmth and key it as sincere and “authentic” (a construct of its laid-back and understated delivery). The visual counterpoint to this is a physical presence that combines a tall, commanding physique and a chiseled, well-defined chin and forehead with scarred and pockmarked skin, typecasting him as supporting actor rather than leading man. His performance style tends to avoid highly ostensive gestures—in the words of one critic, he is regarded as “an actor’s actor” because “he’s understated *and* he steals scenes” (Cardace, original emphasis). Within the context of the narrative, he is an enigma—we know virtually nothing about his time undercover, although in the pilot he clearly is suspicious of the Jennings (at one point he searches their garage); he and his family appear to befriend them, raising questions regarding whether he is a dupe or playing a long game with them. Furthermore, his secret affair with Nina, a former KGB agent (and then double agent) working at the Russian embassy, demonstrates his capacity to conceal the truth from his close family and colleagues. His performance, combined with the warmth of his voice and its understated apparent sincerity, codes his character as paradoxically trustworthy yet also enigmatic and hard to read. As with the other performances, a game of cat-and-mouse spying is produced through his character’s engagement with other characters, often producing narrative suspense.

One of the most memorable scenes of the pilot episode involves the Jennings family (Philip, Elizabeth, Paige, and Henry) and the Beemans meeting for the first time, with Elizabeth carrying a tray of freshly baked brownies to greet their new neighbors. As in the ice-

cream scene, Philip and Elizabeth's performance of themselves as a suburban American couple is thrown into relief by the presence of the children, yet it acquires several more layers here, with the Beemans as an "audience" for their performance. But also, it is unclear whether Beeman is suspicious of the Jennings, with Philip's grin appearing more nervous as Stan tells him about his job. The final shot is held half a second too long on Philip and Elizabeth, with Matthew Rhys's nervous grin reaching screwball comedy levels. Meanwhile, Emmerich, with his warm, friendly voice and welcoming demeanor, manages to be simultaneously "open" and inscrutable.

Television performers such as Emmerich are, of course, aware of the way the camera frames them, and they adjust the scale of their performance accordingly. The close-up, as Naremore has noted, is often used to represent character interiority and ostends even the slightest of movements. This offers the performer the opportunity to work in minute detail, where even a slight twitch can be registered by the camera. The reaction shot, and its repetition and accumulation across a series, is also a key component in constructing a televisual performance that is offered more time and space to develop than film performance. Similarly, the relationship between performance and technology is significant (Bode). The use of zoom lens, for instance, can flatten shot depth and thereby foreground the performer, or bring the minutiae of the actor's performance onto the screen. Multi-track sound-mixing and improved microphone technology can enable television to present a soundscape within which the actor's voice may be brought forward or reduced, often used as a means of keying the actor's performance.

Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, I have argued that recognizing performance involves evaluation. Goffman insists that the relationship constructed between performance and audience—a particular kind of arrangement involving interpretation by the latter—is fundamental to meaning, stating quite simply, "[N]o audience, no performance" (125). Similarly, Graham F. Thompson places emphasis on inter-

pretation, defining performance as the "mode of assessment of the 'textual/character/actor' interaction" (Thompson 78). Part of this is the connection between person (the actor) and character (the role he or she performs) and how this is then mediated to an audience, drawing on social, cultural, and technological framing in order to understand how each differs from the other. This is by no means a simple relationship. For Goffman, "there is a relation between persons and role. But the relationship answers to the interactive system—to the frame—in which the role is performed and the self of the performer is glimpsed" (573). Although Goffman is here principally referring to the roles we all play in different social situations, he also considers dramatic performance—such as acting in television—as a rekeying and layering (what he calls "laminating") of this social process. In his terms the process of "lamination" transforms one whole "strip" of activity into another (e.g., through recording) (561). For dramatic performance, Goffman argues that keying transforms the activity into a "staged being," stating that "the theatrical frame is something less than a benign construction and something more than a simple keying . . . a corpus of transcription practices must be involved for transforming a strip of offstage, real activity into a strip of staged being" (138). The relationship between "everyday life" and staged performance is therefore more than the performance of self that Goffman famously described; it is the *inference* of a performance of self engaged in a performance of a *character*. The complex interaction between text, character, and actor is layered, and the inferred relationship we read between performance and representation adds to the semantic complexity. In *The Americans*, as we have seen, the layered narrative adds extra levels of detail to the pleasures of reading the performance. The meaning itself does not reside wholly "in performance," then, but is mediated through sets of contextual epistemological frames or schema that give performance signs their relevance and meaning and that are decoded by audiences through accumulated forms of cultural capital.

Previously, I quoted Goffman's maxim "no audience, no performance." The recognition of performance is a pleasure and one that viewers often share, especially in an era of "second-screen" viewing, where the television or larger screen is often supplemented by a laptop, tablet, or phone screen that is active during watching. Social networking sites and applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr all showcase the fascination and pleasure that audiences have with television performances. Review and discussion sites, both formal (critics' reviews, interviews, the show's "official" website) and informal (blogs, user-generated content), offer useful examples of the everyday, sometimes vernacular, discussions about and engagements with screen performance. This can be seen most overtly in fan discourse, where the affective engagement of the fan ostends and reframes performance signs, leading to what Barry King has called the "hypersemioticisation" of the actor (41), whose expressions and idiolect can be quoted and repeated for fan consumption and circulation, layering signification. A recent example of this has been the sharing of animated GIFs, or images of performances, on social media, created by websites such as Giphy. In the case of *The Americans*, a quick search on Giphy reveals 19,515 animated images, often catching nuanced and memorable aspects of the actor's performances, especially facial expressions in close-up (see links in this article's notes for animated GIFs), revealing the audience's investment in the performers' nuances, idiolects, and idiosyncrasies.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusions

In his 1974 Cambridge inaugural lecture "Drama in a Dramatised Society," Raymond Williams—a Welshman, like Matthew Rhys, and also an acute observer of American television—argued, "Drama is a special kind of use of quite general processes of presentation, representation, signification" (qtd. in O'Connor 7). In this article, I have revisited issues of performance, intention-

ality, and presence, alongside accumulation and repetition, to consider the experience of watching television performances across different devices, different nations, different social spaces, and different times. I have also discussed what we might call the "accumulated performance," the experience we have living with and watching a long-running series, building up knowledge of the performances and close familiarity with the actors/characters over time.

Television's economies of performance are, as John Caughie has noted, often rooted in pleasures of "an aesthetic of detail" ("What Do Actors" 167). Fleeting moments of performance, brief glances, tiny gestures, and momentary flickers of the eyes are replete with meaning, yet so often difficult to grasp and hold up for analytical dissection. The repetition of our encounters with television means acting is, as Caughie notes, "layered with little histories which give no purchase to the theoretical divisions of identification and distance" in ways in which performance is often theorized ("What Do Actors" 168). Decoding television performance therefore relies on working through such knowledge, informing and sometimes deconstructing conventions of interpretation, breaking frames that foreground and privilege some modes of performance over others, and then holding up and analyzing the pleasures of performance. As seen in *The Americans*, by reframing television performance, placing it central to an analysis of television, we are better able to understand the accumulated performances we experience in television and their complex and layered meanings.

## NOTES

1. For an exploration of "quality TV" debates, see the range of essays in McCabe and Akass.

2. A quick search of Giphy, for example, shows a number of animated GIFs that capture the wordless glances of Philip and Elizabeth. For glances by Philip and Elizabeth, see "#tv #fx #the americans #elizabeth jennings" and "#tv #fx #the americans #310." Another animated GIF captures Claudia's (Margo Martindale) scowl as she un reassuringly reassures Elizabeth that she is on her side (see "#tv #fx #the americans #111").

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